

10-30-98
Rewrite

HISTORY OF THE CIRCLE RANCH ROCK HOUSE IN THE CITY OF ROCKS

The original rock house was built in 1904 - 1905 by Aaron McBride, a rock mason, and William E. Tracy. His wife was Mary Ann. Mr. Tracy was a rock layer and house builder. A stone with W. E. T. on it was placed just above the upstairs bedroom window on the south side outside wall of the house. Eighteen inch thick rock walls were installed to provide excellent insulation keeping the house warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Tracy's came from Yost in 1901 and lived in a log cabin and barn until the house was built. Mrs. Fanny Marilla Tracy, who was William's mother, rented out the rooms upstairs and prepared a hot meal for families from Grouse Creek when they came for church meetings at Almo. A daughter, Emily, was married there to Jack Tooth on Christmas Day 1906. The Tracy family lived there for five years.

John H. and Jennie M. Hull and family moved to the Circle Ranch circa 1909. They added the wooden back porch on the west side, and also remodeled the east bedroom on the main floor, adding the large window and capstone with the inscription J. H. H. 1909. A porch on the southeast corner of the house held a swing and covered the water pump. Beautiful music rang out from this home when Hulls were there. John had a small orchestra and traveled some. He played the coronet, harmonica and almost any other instrument.

The Job and Amanda Adams family came in the fall of 1915. A fond memory of Reta Adams Blair is the back porch and cellar underneath. The process of separating the cream from the milk was one of the jobs done on the back porch. A trap door allowed entrance to the cellar. Since there was only dirt between the rock walls, rats and mice had free agency to roam and feast on the good things stored there, such as vegetables, potatoes, fruits and other commodities. Amanda

insisted on keeping one or two bull snakes (also called blow snakes) in the cellar keeping the area rid of rats, mice and gophers. However, about once a week the snakes would suck up the cream off the milk pan, and the milk had to be fed to the dogs, cats or pigs.

Around 1921 Adams traded the ranch, cattle and machinery to two brothers, William A. and James S. Wilson, and their wives Lucy and Dessa, for 80 acres of farm land in Rupert. After two years Job Adams and family returned to the Circle Ranch. The last time the Adams family left the rock house, they turned it over to Tom and Olive Shoemaker, she was his sister, who made their home there until 1935.

Annie Amanda Green from Almo, who did midwiving throughout the valley, delivered several children in the rock house.

Late in 1935 Ernie and Agnus Sparks took residence in the house, and were there until the house was formally occupied late in November of 1938.

My parents, Albert and Elaine Nicholson, sister Patricia and I moved in the day after Thanksgiving in 1938. Snow came in on us during our first breakfast as the roof needed repair. Mother said, "It was a beautiful sight drifting down through the ceiling." There were five bullet holes lined up perfectly in the ceiling of the front room. Batts were upstairs. They were gotten rid of through a broken window--most windows were. The front room floor had to be repaired, and hard wood was laid before the piano could be brought in. My mother, Elaine, played the piano beautifully and we all frequently sang along.

As the years went by, numerous repairs and changes were made, including replacement of two

small windows on the south side wall with a large picture window. This was done in the early 40's. The porch on the south east corner was taken down as well. I'll never forget when the big new kitchen sink was installed on the east side of the kitchen. I was about eight years old and wanted to sleep in it. We *all* wanted to do the dishes! Electricity was added in 1951. Michael (Mick), my brother, remembers the last light pole being planted, the wire being connected and the first gleam of light when they flipped the switch. What a special moment that was! My father, Albert (Nick) added a bathroom to the main floor in 1952--*oh happy day!*

Patricia recalls the west windowsill of the main bedroom being used as our refrigerator to set jello, cool fresh homemade pie, and candy, etc.; however, Old Tuck, our biggest and best workhorse, loved to put his head through the window when it was open. That was a real sight to see. Goodies, of course, couldn't be left there if he was loose. She also recalls her east bedroom upstairs being the warmest, because the chimney was part of the wall and heat came from it.

A special remembrance of sister Karleen was about the new born lambs. Dad would wrap them in old rags and put them on the oven door of our wood stove in the kitchen to keep them warm. If a lamb died its skin was used to keep another lamb warm. Lambing was in the bitter cold months of February and March.

We all remember the large crocks in the upstairs *walk in closet* adjoining the south bedroom. They were filled with sweet pickles, dill pickles, or sauerkraut. The shelves were filled with fruit mother bought and canned, or canned vegetables which came from our own garden.

Annie-I-over the house with a softball was a favorite summertime game. We played it hour after hour. In the winter we played pinochle almost every evening after dinner. We knew how to play

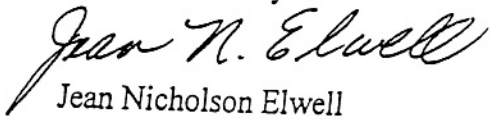
before going to first grade. Roller skating kitty-corner across the large kitchen floor was another favorite pass time.

Bouncing bet flowers bloomed beautifully under the living room picture window, as well as garden daisies. Iris were along the south side of the house, and lilac bushes next to the large tree in the front yard. A wild yellow rose bush was just north of our front gate.

When the house burned on May 9, 1967, there were two bedrooms, two closets and a hallway upstairs. A bedroom, living room, kitchen, bathroom and hallway completed the main floor; along with the wooden back porch. What a sad day that was! Those causing the fire must have had many remorseful moments. History can't be replaced once it's burned.

The Circle Ranch is still owned by my mother, Elaine M. Nicholson. My father, Albert, passed away in 1996. Brother, Michael (Mick) Nicholson now runs the Circle Ranch. Some of the family would love to live there again. Maybe someday!

Article written by

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Jean N. Elwell". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Jean Nicholson Elwell

Former occupant of "this old house"